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JIMI HENDRIX AND LIVING

MICHAEL ROSENBAUM

PHOTOS BY ELLIOT LANDY



I have a friend named Tiny, a fine musician, who I imagined was Jimi Hendrix incarnate. I mean everything he does is so sympathique with Hendrix you feel that somewhere there is a connection between the hazy stuffs that make them up. You hear Hendrix' music, his vocal intonations, his air projected from this cat and you know he's not copying Jimi. He just is there at the same time. Felt like I knew them both, you know. I'd seen Jimi at the Fillmore and there he was tonguing his Strat, doing shoulder stretching exercises with it behind his neck, battering into his amp. Well Tiny's got it too. He kind of falls into it naturally: tonguing, playing behind himself, microphone-stand guitar-string masturbation and all. And I know this is natural stuff. It's the physical result of his musical mind. But the idea of an act seems to get a lot of people uptight. They say it's nonmusical and a put-on.

There are two different worlds in pop music, the recording studio and the live performance. The studio requires a nonvisual projection of a group's personality and sound; music but with a little more. On record the "Doors" tried a very visual thing with Morrison's "Horse Latitudes." The Who took one of their live raves and applied it to the studio in the form of their latest lp, in which energy is transformed from amp smashing and guitar killing by Peter Townshend into radio commercials and fillers which carry the meaning of their live act (or the meaning that once was there) into recording. Vanilla Fudge came across on their first album much as they do live, which is indeed a shame. Visibility is not essential in recording, however.

Now find a group on stage. People are there to listen and to watch and maybe to dance (depending which coast you're on). And here many of the "new" American groups don't make it. With the exception of most of the black artists and a few groups like the Doors, the Mothers, Big Brother and the Holding Company and recently Country Joe and the Fish, the meat of American pop is to let the audience sit and watch or dance while the performers stand and presumably play their best. Certainly there is nothing wrong with playing well on stage. We all get turned on by a good gig.

We talked to Jimi Hendrix about playing live:



CRAWDADDY: Are there times when you're playing when you feel on or off? Like you know you're having a good or bad night?

HENDRIX: Like sometimes you're playing bad and the audience comes up and pats you on the back sayin' "Man, that was fantastic!" Well you really feel bad, you know, it makes me feel worse. That's just the way I think. Nothing's going to change me from that way, 'cause that's the way I think about music.

CRAWDADDY: When you're playing do you feel somebody else in the group is leading you into, for instance, a classical riff like in "Third Stone from the Sun" or "Bold as Love"? Or all of a sudden does it pop into your mind and you lay it down and you bring the others along with you, on to it?

HENDRIX: You mean like for instance I'm taking a solo on it?

CRAWDADDY: Yeah.

HENDRIX: It's more of a mutual thing, like, you know. Most of the time everybody's playing the way they feel towards the other notes that they're hearing. You know, like from Mitch and Noel . . . or me.

CRAWDADDY: Do you care if other people listen to you, if somebody knows what you're doing?

HENDRIX: Oh yes. I really do care quite naturally for that.

CRAWDADDY: Can you tell us something about an act?

HENDRIX: Well, like there's different ways of showing what you can do and like that. Like you might feel like jumping around and other groups might say that's bad. Well that necessarily isn't bad, it just isn't what they're doing. It's a different scene altogether.

Good music on stage coupled with visual dullness denies the theater aspect of the live performance. Visual presentation, including dress and movement, is as important to a live performance as is the music. And this is where English groups are at. They have had judged for them previously the value of unique stage appearance and comportment by the live experiences of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Too many otherwise intelligent American listeners have put down outrageous acts as being nonmusical, extraneous and an excuse for

poor playing. Yet the best of England's new wave, the Move, the Who, the Jimi Hendrix Experience, to name a fraction, all have individual acts. Of course you can miss digging a particular act. Response, after all, has a lot to do with it, as Jimi Hendrix and Mitch Mitchell point out later on.

Now there appear to be roughly two sorts of act "styles." The Internal and the External (we could call them). Briefly, the internal is spontaneous emotional movement by a performer or group. Theater springs from the motion that comes from intensity of musicianship. Jimmy Page of the "Yardbirds" is a very internal cat. This lean fellow stalks the stage as he plays, shakes his guitar and body, moves electrically, his whole body a synapse. Even his stepping on the fuzz button is dynamic. (A voice whispers, "Maybe he's putting you on.") It sure doesn't matter, except to my point, and it might even make my point at that, if you know what I mean. You are what you pretend to be. He still gets me involved and I'm locked into him until the end. "When the music's over. . ."

Now as for the external, it can be defined as theater set apart from the music, created to enhance the music, and, to get the audience involved, visually at first. Mick Jagger gets you that way. So does Jim Morrison. The internal is the father of the external; if the internal loses its novelty and spontaneity, yet continues largely unchanged. We might also find a spontaneous external, again Morrison as a prime example, in the form of extemporaneous speeches which are part of the performer's theatrical concept. The action here is spontaneous but the form is calculated, hence external. Often people don't dig the external. The problem is, it's sometimes hard to decide if something is natural or not. Or maybe the act is too outrageous. Not that it should really matter. But that is kind of a copout, so I'll give an example and see what we come up with.

Take an external act like the "Who" as we see them in the U.S. (They've quit this scene in England.) They smash everything in sight, destroy. Now we know that this act once was internal. Maybe one night they were cooking so badly that they just had to beat on something or maybe some equipment went (see the Yardbirds in "Blow-Up"), so instead of fighting among themselves

(which they and the Kinks were known for), they attacked their amps, and the animalism, the sex and violence thing, blew the audience. You know they dug it: release, noise, smoke. Ah, the audience and the group together. Spontaneity is at the core. And so along comes someone's acute observation that the audience was crazy about the destruction. It's all good fun and very commercial. So the act is externalized. It becomes a code for recognition of the group, something *de rigueur*. It can become a monkey on the group's back but skillful publicity and a new slant on the act or something more outrageous can kill the monkey. The gimmick. But a gimmick is groovy. It's another type of showmanship. And pop is all encompassing anyhow. There's no harm, though. Don't take it all so seriously. Like they did on the Monkees' tour attended by the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

CRAWDADDY: Could you tell us what happened with the Monkees' tour?

HENDRIX: Oh, it was great, you know. It's just that the Daughters [D.A.R.] really got us. And so this didn't bother us. Like little kids, they dug us. At least they acted like they did. They rushed the stage and all and probably that's what turned the scene on towards us. They say "What is this about, kids rushin' that? Uch! Too erotic and all this." And actually we weren't actually thrown out. We just decided it was best for us, and, you know. 'Cause we had an average of three hundred gigs offered to us which we couldn't possibly do anyway but we still did a few of them, you know. Which I was very glad 'cause we had to go to Sweden anyway. There's no big hassle about that.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience has the spontaneity which sometimes is spontaneity and sometimes isn't but looks like it. They made some comments on working on stage and spontaneity in the act and music. I mentioned to Noel Redding, their superb bass player, that an article in a British paper said that Hendrix had, in the course of one show, wrestled Noel to the floor, and that he tongues with his bass, too. This seemed a departure from what he'd done at the Fillmore in June, which was pretty stationary. Noel felt that it depended on how much he got into the atmosphere and music that night that moved him to greater feats or not. Mitch Mitchell, newly emerged as a great creative drummer, places a lot of importance on audience-performer rapport.

MITCH: . . . this is why I like what we're doing. People show some kind of enthusiasm, they really get into what they're doing. We can't, you know, try to analyze what we play. We might go and play just for ourselves. But that's the way we play that night, you know. We don't know what we're going to do at the



studio half the time. We don't know what we're going to do on stage. It's the contact between people.

CRAWDADDY: How do you feel when it doesn't happen, man? When the audience kind of dies on you and it's just you three people?

MITCH: Well, they might be a bit selfish. 'Cause we want to give out. I want to give out and establish the audience as a part of what we're doing. But we've got to satisfy ourselves. Obviously, if you can see that we're enjoying what we're doing on stage, you know, like you can get into it.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience is a perfectly integrated example of stage and recording technique. They make the best of both worlds. Their latest *lp Axis Bold As Love* is excellently produced, with Charles Chandler at the helm sticking Mitch Mitchell right in the middle so you can get everything. And his drumming is splendid. The idea of "jazz feel" occurs to me because Mitch's drumming is very pragmatic. He's melody and rhythm too. All three of them are. The trio works.

CRAWDADDY: Had you thought about the idea of a trio before you went over to England?

HENDRIX: No. I was thinking of the smallest pieces possible with the hardest impact. If it had taken two or twenty or ten, you know. But it came out a trio which is great.

CRAWDADDY: Did you see any problems in making up for depth of sound, the lack of rhythm or lead guitar?

HENDRIX: You see, if you want to do something it's best to do it yourself, right? So I figure that if you have a rhythm guitar player or even a lead guitar player there's going to be some things that are going to slow down the whole thing 'cause you have to show him exactly what you want yourself, as far as guitar comes in.

Mitch Mitchell said that his style has changed since coming to the trio. "... The basic thing is working with three people. It's got its drawbacks, but it's great in other ways. You've got a lot more freedom. ... We're still new. ... We're just finding out about each other.

Noel Redding found the switch from guitar to bass easy and finds the bass an easier instrument. He chords on his Fender and his Hagstrom eight-string, which he uses mostly for studio work. His style is melodic bass and he works out simple riffs or complex ones according to what Jimi and Mitch are doing. The bass sound in *Axis Bold As Love* is the deepest (with the most muffled clarity) I've ever heard. Noel does not attribute this to any conscious technique except maybe "big fat wire strings" and Marshall equipment. He wrote one song in the new lp, "She's so Fine." It's the hardest rock piece among many hard rock pieces on the album. Noel gave Jimi the ideas for most of the guitar work.

The lyric work on the lp is its weak point. Jimi, who wrote all but one of the tunes, is overly verbose. His ideas are all there, you know, what he wanted to write about, but his verse structure lacks grace and subtlety. (Why was this brought up at all? Simply because the words are staring at you from inside the jacket and you can't help but notice their awkwardness.) He shares his lack of verbal fluency with Eric Burdon, but there the comparison ends. Jimi does his act, makes it a logical outgrowth of his speedy guitar. Don't be put off by his lyrics. His guitar is his own. All we need listen to, now, are his music and his vocal inflections. In this realm he is musician-poet-painter. On the subject of songs:

CRAWDADDY: The thing I wanted to know is like the song "Bold As Love," you tie in colors and feelings, right?

HENDRIX: Like yeah. Like some feelings make you think of different colors. Jealousy is purple; I'm purple with rage or purple with anger, and green is envy and all this. This is like you explain your different emotions in color towards this certain girl who has all the colors in the world, you know. In other words you don't think you have to part [with these emotions] but you're willing to try.

CRAWDADDY: When you write your songs, on the new album specifically, do you have the music in mind first, or do you have the lyrics down to a situation and you fit the music in, or they come together?

HENDRIX: Oh a lot of times that all depends, though, really. Like some songs I come up with the music. Most of them that I do come up with the music, then I could put the words so much easier that fit the type of music that it makes me think of, you know. And then other times when you get nice words together, you have to think of the music that could fit. It all depends on how I'm doin', there's no certain patterns I go by 'cause



I'm not actually . . . I don't consider myself a song writer. Not yet, anyway.

CRAWDADDY: What do you want to do with your songs in the future? You seem to have some idea. . . .

HENDRIX: Well, as I say, I'd like to explore whatever happens to them, that's enough. That's the only way I can explain myself thoroughly is through songs.

CRAWDADDY: Can you tell us something about your lyric flow? How your words come out?

HENDRIX: Well, a lot of times you get an idea from something you might have seen . . . you know. And then you can write it down the way it really happened or you can write it down the way you might have wanted it to happen or the way it could have happened, you know. For instance, you know, like . . . I can't think of one song I wrote (laughter).

CRAWDADDY: I mean a song like "If Six was Nine."

HENDRIX: That's just a straightforward song. How you feel at a particular time.

CRAWDADDY: Everything flows out, it's not cut down in phrases or anything like that.

HENDRIX: No, that was a completely jam session that we had and did that and then put the words on that. We was going to do that over again, but. . . .

CRAWDADDY: A song like "Little Wing," it's short, swift and very beautiful.

HENDRIX: There's nothing else I wanted to say to that. Keep it just like that.

And, man, if you haven't heard "Red House"! It's available only on the first English lp. It shows one of the places Jimi came from, the blues. It's about a lover who returns to his girl's house to find "this key don't unlock the door." It ends with the happy idea that if his old chick doesn't dig him anymore, "her sister will." Wish I could invite you all over to hear this cut.

CRAWDADDY: What about a cut like "Red House," a really straight, down home, beautiful blues?

HENDRIX: Yes, I like that.

CRAWDADDY: And they left that off the American first album, the bastards. I thought it was one of the greatest cuts I ever heard.

HENDRIX: Thank you. We have more of those where that one came from.

CRAWDADDY: Can you release any of that stuff?

HENDRIX: Yeah. Our next lp is going to be exactly the way we want it or else . . . you know. And it calls for two or three things, those funky tunes which I call funk and down-to-earth real tunes.

CRAWDADDY: How much unlike what you wanted is *Axis Bold As Love*?

HENDRIX: . . . I like "Little Wing." I like "Bold as Love," "Little Miss Lover" . . .

The new lp shows acute mastery of styles by the



Experience. "Up From the Skies" is a wah-wah-ed easy jazz blues. Takes you back to some of Mose Allison and a bit of Georgie Fame, maybe. There has been more maturation on this album than radical change. You'll hear *Axis Bold As Love*, won't you?

Can the internal act form and the external happen at the same time within and without one person? Sure. Watch Hendrix. You're pretty positive he's going to tongue and play behind his neck and be very blatantly sexual and that's external but he's a moving musical energy man, he's got to do something up there and this fact of having to do something is internal.

Again, an act can be completely external, concocted, a "put-on." And that's all right too as long as you don't get paranoid and think they're trying to fool you. 'Cause even though they might try, it doesn't matter 'cause it's all part of the theater and nobody is going to hurt you. So now I'm not as uptight about Vanilla Fudge because, well, trust your taste in music, and I'll never get offended again by them on stage. Just maybe by their lack of taste in doing certain songs that don't deserve to be destroyed.

